DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 274 461 PS 016 087

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TITLE Benefits of Structured Field Trip Activities on Performance on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) among a Group of Black Preschoolers.
PUB DATE [83]
NOTE 11p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Black Youth; *Field Trips; *Performance Factors; *Preschool Children; Preschool Education; *Receptive Language; Urban Youth
IDENTIFIERS Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test

ABSTRACT

Preschoolers are taken on many field trips during the course of their preschool experience. Yet, little research investigates the effects of such curricular offerings on children's developing social and intellectual skills. Intuitively, educators tend to agree that field trips are beneficial to children. However, findings of relevant studies are inconclusive on this point. The purpose of this study was to determine whether field trips with prior and follow-up activities had a more positive effect on black preschool children's test performance than did field trips without such activities. The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) was used to assess treatment effects. A total of 52 urban black children between 4 and 5 years old were equally divided into an experimental group and a comparison group and were taken on 6 weekly field trips to places such as the local zoo and selected museums. Activities provided to the experimental group included drawing, discussing what was experienced on a trip, and acting out what was observed during a trip. Prior to leaving, experimental group participants and their teachers discussed what they were going to experience. Items experienced on the trips were selected to match items on the PPVT. Findings indicated that children exposed to structured field trips achieved greater gains on the PPVT than did children exposed to the non-structured field trips. (RH)

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BENEFITS OF STRUCTURED FIELD TRIP ACTIVITIES ON PERFORMANCE ON THE PEABODY PICTURE VOCABULARY TEST (PPVT) AMONG A GROUP OF BLACK PRESCHOOLERS

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ED274461
PS 016087

ABSTRACT

Preschoolers are taken on many field trips during the course of their preschool experience. Yet, there is a paucity of research on the benefits of these field trip experiences in terms of the developing child's social and intellectual skills. Intuitively, educators tend to agree that field trips are beneficial to children. However, the little scientific data that exist are inconclusive on this point. The purpose of the present study was to determine whether structured field trips with prior and followup activities had a more positive effect than non-structured field trips on performance on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) among a group of black preschoolers. The results showed that children exposed to structured field trips achieved greater gains on the PPVT than children exposed to the non-structured field trips.

The field trip is a very popular activity among preschool centers where, according to the 1980 census, approximately 7.5 million young children spend as much as 30 to 50 hours per week. There are, of course, a variety of reasons why preschool teachers take preschoolers on field trips. One of the main reasons, supposedly, is the reinforcement value of field trips on learning. During a field trip children are able to see, hear, smell, touch and sometimes taste the objects they only read about or are told about in the classroom. This multimodal, multisensory experience, supposedly, results in greater learning (Day and Parker, 1977). However, the evidence on the influence of field trips on learning among preschoolers is, at best, inconclusive and very sparse.

Ballenger (1983), argued in favor of the positive effect of field trips on learning. He defined good preschool programs as those which provide opportunities for children to have experiences that allow them to explore their environments, to gain judgment of symbols and to develop a pattern of exploration. Hymes (1962), pointed out that experimenting, exploring, discovering, trying out, restructuring, speaking and listening are activities which characterize good preschool programs. Zigler and Trickett (1978) also posited that children's social competencies are influenced by certain experiences and interactions, such as those provided by field trips. Those authors, however, did not systematically study the benefits of field trip experiences on learning among preschoolers in the case of this study among black preschoolers. They did not manipualte the field trip condition. In the present study the field trip condition

was manipulated and the resulting effect on children's performance on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT), a measure of receptive language, examined.

One of the few studies that somewhat approximated the purpose of the present study was one conducted by Falbo and Cooper (1980). They studied the relationship between scores on the PPVT, Form A and children's interactions with their parents, siblings and peers. They found that PPVT scores were positively and significantly related to children's interactions with their parents and siblings but negatively related to interaction with their peers. However, the authors did not systematically vary the field trip condition as was done in the present study. The same thing is true of a study by Goff and Montagne (1980) who also used the PPVT as a measure of receptive language among 30 rural black 4 and 5 year olds. They found no significant relationship between various types of experiences and performance on the PPVT. They did not have a control group with which to compare the group receiving field trip exposure.

Given the paucity of systematic research and investigation into the influence of field trip experiences on learning in general and receptive language development in particular, among black preschoolers, the authors undertook the present study. The purpose was to determine if well organized and structured field trips, with prior and follow up related, in-class activity, would have a significantly more positive effect on receptive language as measured by the PPVT than field trips undertaken for pleasure only and with no prior and follow up in-class activity. It was felt that this was an important question to investigate, given the

frequency with which preschoolers are taken on field trips. If it could be demonstrated that field trip experiences benefit children in some concrete ways, especially in terms of their social and intellectual growth, then as an educational tool they should be maintained. Also, if structured field trips with prior and follow up in-class activity can be shown to produce superior results in terms of children's learning, then it would be incumbent upon preschool teachers to structure field trip experiences in such a way as to maximize their benefits.

The research questions addressed in this study were:

(1) Do field trip experiences have a positive effect on the receptive language, measured by the PPVT, among black preschoolers?

(2) Do structured field trips, carefully planned and organized with related in-school activities before and after the field trips, have a more positive effect on receptive language, measured by the PPVT, than non-strucutred field trips, among black preschoolers?

Methodology

Subjects: Fifty two young urban black children were subjects in this study. The fact that all subjects were black was incidental to the purpose of the study. They were between four and five years of age. They attended two preschool centers in a metropolitan city. An approximately equal number of boys and girls were included. The children were matched on the variables of age, parental occupations, education and income. Family size and pretest scores on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, Form A were also controlled for the sample. A demographic questionnaire designed by the authors was completed by parents and used to match

children.

Procedure

The children were assigned to two groups, an experimental group and a comparison group. Both groups were taken on weekly field trips to interesting places such as the local zoo and selected museums over a six week period. However, the experimental group had organized activities related to the field trips, before and after the trips. The control group had no pre or post-organized activities related to the field trips. Organized activity constituted drawing, discussing what was experienced, and acting out what was observed during a trip. Prior to making the trip, the children and their teachers discussed what they were going to experience. The items experienced in the field trips were selected to match items on the PPVT.

At the beginning of the experiment, the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, Form A, was administered to all of the children. This form and not the new PPVT-R (Dunn and Dunn, 1981) was used because a follow-up study was already in progress in which the new form was being used. The results of the pretest were used to match children prior to random assignment to experimental and control conditions. At the end of the six weeks, a post test on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test was given to all children.

Instrument

The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) consists of 150 plates. Each plate contains four pictures. The child responds by selecting the appropriate picture for the word on the plate. In this study, each child was presented the plates appropriate for his/her age. The pictures were

related to everyday experiences and the field trips were designed to include objects shown on the pictures. The PPVT is a measure of receptive language ability. The test was standardized on a sample population of 4,012 children ages 2 1/2 to 18 years. Reliability coefficients range from .67 to .84. Validity coefficients are reportedly in the 60's.

Analysis

A test of the mean differences in gain scores between pre and post tests on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, Form A, for the experimental and control groups, was performed to determine whether the two groups differed significantly on the gain score between their pre and post test performances.

RESULTS

Both groups of students did significantly better on the post test than they did on the pretest. However, the experimental group showed a significantly greater increase in mean number of correct responses on the PPVT than did the control group. The number of correct responses and the pre-post differences are shown in Table 1:

TABLE 1

Pre and Posttest Scores on the Peabody Vocabulary Test

Field Trip Condition	Sample Size N	Pretest Mean Score	Posttest Mean Score	Mean Gain Score	t	sig.
Structured Field Trip	26	42.54	63.42	20.88		
Nonstructured Fied Trip	26	39.78	47.88	8.1	6.06	.02

DISCUSSION

The results indicated that generally field trips tended to have a positive effect on the receptive language (PPVT) of the children in the sample. Both groups in the study showed gains on the PPVT following their field trips. However, the structured field trip group showed significantly larger gains. This indicates that while any field trip experience may have a positive effect, an experience that is properly planned and carefully tied to a lesson plan with prior and followup activity, is much more likely to have a greater effect on receptive language.

These findings are consistent with those reported by Zepeda-de-Kane (1975). He found that children who were permitted to draw pictures about items experienced during a field trip retained more information. They also verbalized more and used more complex sentences than children not given the opportunity to draw and discuss their experiences.

It would seem that structured field trips with time to discuss and analyze experiences provide an outstanding opportunity for the growth of language facility. Children are better able to evaluate, test, encode and store information when their teachers provide a framework for discussion and analysis.

Implications

The implications for the findings in this study are significant. Preschoolers have the capacity to benefit from a variety of experiences. During field trips children are exposed to many stimuli and opportunities to build their vocabularies and enhance their awareness and sensitivities.

Field trip experiences should be viewed as pleasant opportunities for

growth and development. Teachers should maximize the potential for learning during field trip experiences, among of their preschoolers, by having prior and followup field trip discussions and providing opportunities for activities which would lead to efficient processing of information, encoding and storage.

A collateral benefit may also occur. If children, during their preschool years, are guided in developing an appreciation for the educational value of the diverse objects in their environment, they may develop more positive, sensitive and responsible attitudes toward themselves and their environments.

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